

SPEECH

OF

CHARLES BROWN, OF PENN.,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1848,

In defence of the Administration on the Mexican War.

Mr. BROWN said:

Mr. SPEAKER: It was the furthest possible from my intention, when I entered the House this morning, to participate in the debate that has been so long going on before the Committee of the Whole and the House, on the mere reference of the President's message to committees. I preferred to say all I might deem necessary on the war, or any other subject, when it was fairly before the House for its definite action. But, sir, the violent attack made on the Administration of Mr. Polk by the gentleman from Georgia, on the other side of the House, [Mr. STEPHENS,] who has just taken his seat, seemed to me to require a brief but immediate reply.

The gentleman charges Mr. Polk with being the cause of the present war with Mexico—as he and his friends on the opposite side have voted, a war “unconstitutionally and unnecessarily” begun by the President. The whole tenor of his remarks goes to fix upon Mr. Polk a direct intention—a secret and unexplained motive—a determined design—to involve the United States in a war with Mexico; and not finding any evidence of this in all that is known to the world, he is led to declare that its real origin will never be known till the secret instructions to Mr. Slidell are published. Now, sir, I venture to assert, that when these instructions shall be made public, as doubtless one day they will, they will exhibit still more strongly than all that has yet appeared the ardent desire of the Administration to restore and establish peaceful relations with Mexico. But, sir, why should he suppose there is in these secret instructions anything to convict the President of such a design? Was there anything in the negotiation of Mr. Slidell itself, or in the correspondence, or circumstances that led to his mission, to justify such a supposition?—Let us examine them.

On the annexation of Texas, the Mexican minister to the United States, General Almonte, left the country, declaring the friendly relations between the United States and Mexico were terminated by that act; which he had previously declared would, if consummated, lead “inevitably to war.” He left on the 6th of March, 1845. From that time all friendly intercourse ceased between the two countries. The Administration, anxious to restore it, and to avoid the war likely to grow out of such a state of things, on the 7th September, wrote to our consul at Mexico, Mr. Black, that—

“Information recently received at this department, both from yourself and others, renders it probable that the Mexi-

can Government may now be willing to restore the diplomatic relations between the two countries. At the time of their suspension, General Almonte was assured of the desire felt by the President to adjust amicably every cause of complaint between the Governments, and to cultivate the kindest and most friendly relations between the sister Republics. He still continues to be animated by the same sentiments. It was his duty to place the country in a condition successfully to resist the threatened invasion of Texas by Mexico, and this has been accomplished. He desires, however, that all existing differences should be terminated amicably by negotiation, and not by the sword. He is anxious to preserve peace, although prepared for war.

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“If the President were disposed to stand upon a mere question of etiquette, he would wait until the Mexican Government, which had suspended the diplomatic relations between the two countries, should ask that they may be restored. But his desire is so strong to terminate the present unfortunate state of our relations with that Republic, that he has consented to waive all ceremony, and take the initiative.”

Mexico of her own will had terminated our peaceful relations, and had not offered to renew them. Our army had not then marched from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande, and yet we find the Administration taking the initiative and waiving all etiquette to endeavor to restore peace. Does the gentleman find in *this* evidence of the bloodthirsty desire of Mr. Polk to make war unnecessarily and unconstitutionally upon Mexico? On the contrary, the whole correspondence between our Government and its consul, and our consul and the Mexican Government, breathes in every line the most sincere desire for peace. To the desires of our Government “that all existing differences should be terminated amicably,” the Mexican Government under Herrera yielded an apparent compliance, and agreed to receive a commissioner to negotiate, in the following language of his minister, Peña y Peña, October 15, 1845:

“In answer, I have to say to you, that although the Mexican nation is deeply injured by the United States, through the acts committed by them in the department of Texas, which belongs to this nation, my Government is disposed to receive the Commissioner of the United States who may come to this capital, with full powers from his Government to settle the present dispute, in a peaceful, reasonable, and honorable manner.”

In consequence of this desire of our Government, and consent of that of Mexico, was the appointment of Mr. Slidell made. And what was the character and the result of the negotiations then begun, and the failure of which the gentleman from Georgia charges upon Mr. Polk? They are before the world. Mr. Slidell was appointed on the 10th of November, 1845, and his mission was rejected by Herrera's government, December 20. During

all this period, from November 8th to December 20th, every effort was made by our Government, through Mr. Black and Mr. Slidell, to open negotiations for peace. Not a word was said nor an act done by either to irritate the Mexicans or defeat the objects of our Government. The most groundless objections of the Mexican authorities were met in the spirit of forbearance, and the most humiliating requisitions submitted to. No act of hostility was committed. Even our vessels of war, at the request of the Mexican Government, were withdrawn from before Vera Cruz. After all this, Mr. Slidell's mission was rejected—not because our army was at Corpus Christi, for it was there when Mexico consented to negotiate, and she had never made it a subject of complaint—not because it had marched to the Rio Grande, for this it had not done; but that our minister was not what they had agreed to accept—that he was an “envoy,” and not a “commissioner”—that he had too much power, or too little—that his appointment had not been approved by the Senate of the United States—that he had come before he was expected, and other causes alike frivolous and insulting. Nor is there any intimation, in all the correspondence on the part of the Mexican authorities, that Mr. Slidell had not conducted himself pacifically and honorably; and nowhere is there a word of objection to any supposed terms of peace he was authorized to offer or accept. Why, then, is the failure of these negotiations to be attributed to Mr. Polk, or to lead to the inference that its cause is to be found in any secret instructions to Mr. Slidell? The fact is, the Mexican Government, after its first agreement to settle “all our differences” by negotiation, as Mr. Buchanan through Mr. Black proposed, never intended, or was afraid, to negotiate a peace of any kind. Through all its subsequent communications, it refused to treat of anything but the question of Texas. Our annexation of it to the United States had, they said, deeply injured them, and caused the rupture between us; for this alone, therefore, would they negotiate, and would treat of nothing else than reparation for its loss. Not a word would they hear about the settlement of our just claims upon them previous to that time; not a word about settling any boundary line between us. The only matter they would treat of was Texas, which they insisted belonged to them still, and must be restored, or satisfaction made for its loss, before they would even listen to us on any other subject. Would the gentleman from Georgia, who voted for the annexation of Texas, have agreed to treat only on such terms? He did not vote for the annexation of Texas with the intention of paying Mexico for it afterwards. His horror of taking the territory of another nation, by force or fraud, is too great for that. And yet the main reason given for the rejection of Mr. Slidell was, that his mission was not confined solely to this question, but embraced other differences between the two countries—in fact, all differences.

Whatever may have been the real intention of Herrera's government, it is evident the Mexican people had no disposition to make peace with us; for they forced him to resign his Presidency on the ground that he was believed to be in a negotiation with us that would resign their right to Texas, and installed Paredes in his place, pledged to prosecute a war upon us for its recovery.

Though thus rejected by the Mexican Govern-

ment under Herrera, so anxious was the Administration of our Government not to leave a loop to hang a doubt upon as to its intentions, it ordered Mr. Slidell to continue in Mexico “and wait patiently for a final decision of his reception,” and “to take care to act with such prudence and fairness, that (if again rejected) it may appear manifest to the people of the United States and to the world that a rupture could not honorably be avoided.”

In accordance with these instructions, Mr. Slidell on the first March, 1846, after giving a statement of the position of the Mexican Government, says, he “thinks it the most propitious moment that could have been selected” to renew his offers of a peaceful negotiation. He did renew them; and after stating his former failures, addressed Paredes's Government thus:

“The destinies of the Mexican Republic, however; having since been committed to other hands, the President is unwilling to take a course which would inevitably result in war, without making another effort to avert so great a calamity. He wishes, by exhausting every honorable means of conciliation, to demonstrate to the civilized world, that if its peace shall be disturbed, the responsibility must fall upon Mexico alone. He is sincerely desirous to preserve that peace; but the state of *quasi* hostility which now exists on the part of Mexico, is one which is incompatible with the destiny and interests of the United States; and it is for the Mexican Government to decide whether it shall give place to friendly negotiation, or lead to an open rupture.”

These second overtures were rejected by the Mexican Government in still more insulting terms than before; and thus ended the mission of Mr. Slidell.

Now, sir, so far from finding in all this any cause to condemn Mr. Polk for omitting to do anything necessary to pacify Mexico, or for doing anything to widen the breach between the two countries, as has been asserted by the gentleman from Georgia, I have ever thought he did more than was due to a people who, from the very beginning of their Government, had treated us more like enemies than friends; that he stooped too low, and submitted to too many indignities, even to purchase peace, desirable as it was, and much as I would have been disposed to bear and to do to obtain it.

But the gentleman from Georgia says that this last rejection of Mr. Slidell was owing to the march of our army from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande; and this march is made the foundation of the charge of the commencement of an unnecessary and unconstitutional war upon Mexico by the President. The Mexican Government, under Paredes, never said so; but, on the contrary, expressly put the rejection upon other grounds—namely, upon the very same that it was put by Herrera's government two months before. Every man who will read the entire correspondence between the two Governments, and who is not determinately prejudiced against his own Government and in favor of that of Mexico, must see, from first to last, everything on the part of the first frank and sincere, and on that of the last a quibbling, tricky disposition to evade negotiation, while endeavoring to appear to the world to desire it.

Let us now examine another part of the same grave charge of the gentleman from Georgia and his party, and the one on which they mainly rest as the cause of the war—the march of the American army from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande. This, be it recollected, did not take place until the

8th of March, 1846, and after all hope of settling the questions of difference between the two Governments by negotiation had ceased. And why was the army marched to the Rio Grande? Who suggested it, and for what purpose was it ordered? These are important questions—not in a national point of view, for I believe we had a right to send an army there when we pleased, as within the bounds of Texas, and that it would have been perfectly right to send it there at any time after the annexation of that State; but in a political, party point of view, as bearing upon the grave impeachment of Mr. Polk for having thereby begun an unnecessary and unconstitutional war, it becomes important to know the why and the wherefore. And here I might ask the gentleman from Georgia where he finds the least evidence to convict the President of a desire to urge our army forward, hastily or unadvisedly to plunge the two countries in war? Was it in their retention at Corpus Christi from August, 1845, to March, 1846—seven months,—while he was, as I have shown, doing and enduring everything to settle all differences in a peaceful manner? Is it to be found in the orders from time to time issued to that army? Oh, no! he cannot find it there. But I will show him where he will find it—in the letters of General Taylor to the Government. There he will find it written out in letters of light. I say not this to criminate General Taylor, for I agree with him fully, and honor him the more for having advised the Government so wisely and so well. Nor in the advance from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande alone did he in his movements anticipate the Government. From his first arrival in the country, he led, rather than followed, its orders. In his very first letter to the Department of War, dated as early as July 20, 1845, at New Orleans, he says:

"I respectfully acknowledge your communication of July 8th, covering the instructions of the Secretary of War of the same date, relative to the Mexican settlements on this side of the Rio Grande. Those instructions will be closely obeyed; and the department may rest assured that I will take no step to interrupt the friendly relations between the United States and Mexico. I am gratified at receiving these instructions, as they confirm my views, previously communicated, in regard to the proper line to be occupied at present by our troops."

Here he says that his orders "confirm his views, previously communicated, in regard to the *proper line to be occupied at present* by our troops." What line he had previously recommended we only know from this letter, and the order from the department to which it is an answer; that order and this letter clearly fix the Rio Grande as the *proper line to be occupied*, as he says, in accordance with his own views "previously communicated." On the 15th of June he had received an order not to advance to the Rio Grande, but only "to select 'and occupy on or near it, at his discretion, such 'posts as will be best adapted to repel invasion, and 'to protect what will be our western border in the 'event of annexation," and he was "to limit himself to the defence of the territory of Texas." In pursuance of this order, and under the discretionary power given him, he landed in Texas on the 25th of July, 1845, and shortly after encamped at Corpus Christi. From this place he writes to the War Department, August 15: "I have received 'intelligence of the preparatory steps taken by 'Mexico towards a declaration of war against the 'United States. I shall spare no exertions to

'meet suitably this probable change in the relations of the two countries;" and, with the force then expected, "*do something more than maintain a merely defensive attitude on the Nueces.*"

Again, on the same day he writes:

"I am gratified to find my measures thus far have met the approbation of the Government and General-in-chief, and particularly to find that I have but anticipated the wishes of the President in taking up a position west of the Nueces."

Thus far it is plain that General Taylor's movements were either on his own responsibility, or in accordance with his own views, previously communicated to the Government. And where next does the gentleman from Georgia find the evidence to convict the President of prematurely ordering the army to the Rio Grande, and thus commencing an "unnecessary and unconstitutional war?" I will tell him—in the despatch of General Taylor to the Government, dated October 4, 1845. There the General says:

"Corpus Christi is healthy, easily supplied, and well situated to hold in observation the course of the Rio Grande from Matamoras to Laredo, being about 150 miles from several points on the river. I have reason to believe, moreover, that a salutary moral effect has been exercised upon the Mexicans. Their traders are continually carrying home the news of our position and increasing numbers, and are confessedly struck by the spectacle of a large camp of well-appointed and disciplined troops, accompanied by perfect security to their persons and property instead of the impressment and pillage to which they are subject in their own country. For these reasons, our position thus far has, I think, been the best possible; but now that the entire force will soon be concentrated, it may well be a question whether the views of Government will be best carried out by our remaining at this point. It is with great deference that I now make any suggestions on topics which may become matter of delicate negotiation; but if our Government, in settling the question of boundary, makes the line of the Rio Grande an ultimatum, I cannot doubt that the settlement will be greatly facilitated and hastened by our taking possession at once of one or two suitable points on or quite near that river. Our strength and state of preparation should be displayed in a manner not to be mistaken. However salutary may be the effect produced upon the border people by our presence here, we are too far from the frontier to impress the Government of Mexico with our readiness to vindicate, by force of arms, if necessary, our title to the country as far as the Rio Grande."

Here is the first step proposed towards a movement to the Rio Grande. And what does General Taylor say it was for? By order of the President? To commence an "unconstitutional and unnecessary war?" Oh, no! but to "greatly facilitate and hasten the settlement" of the differences between the two countries, and to carry further the "salutary and moral effect that had been exercised upon the Mexicans" by the presence of our army at Corpus Christi. These were the objects General Taylor expected to accomplish by this movement, as early as October 4, 1845, to hasten *peace*, not *war*. This, too, at the very commencement, on our part, of the opening of negotiations for peace. And what did Mr. Polk say to these suggestions of General Taylor? Did he immediately order the army to march forward?—he who is now charged with "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally waging war by that act?" No! he suffered it to remain quietly where it was, and sent forward his minister of peace, Mr. Slidell. Nor did he allow the old General to move till negotiation had failed, and till more than five months after he had first suggested it as desirable and proper.

It has been said that General Taylor retracted his opinion of the propriety of a forward movement. I deny it. There is not a particle of evidence to sustain it; on the contrary, on the 7th of

November, after he knew that negotiations were going on between the two Governments, he thus writes to the War Department:

"The intelligence from Mexico, however, tends to modify, in some degree, the views expressed in that communication, (October 4.) The position now occupied by the troops may perhaps be the best while negotiations are pending, or at any rate until a disposition shall be manifested by Mexico to protract them unreasonably. Under the supposition that such may be the view of the department, I shall make no movement from this point, except for the purpose of examining the country, until further instructions are received."

Does he here retract? No! he only *modifies* his suggestions, and says, "*perhaps*" it is best, "while negotiations are pending," or at any rate *until a disposition shall be manifested by Mexico to protract them unreasonably*," to stay at Corpus Christi, but no longer; clearly indicating that his real opinion remained unchanged, and that he doubted the propriety even then of not moving forward to the Rio Grande. At last, on the 4th of February, he received the order to march, which he had suggested some months before—that order for which the motives of the President are impeached by the gentleman from Georgia and his friends. And what did General Taylor say of it when it was received? Did he say it was "unconstitutional and unnecessary," and therefore hesitate to obey it? No! He says, "I shall *lose no time* in making the necessary preparations for carrying out those instructions;" "that he had every reason to believe 'the people residing on the river were well disposed towards our Government,'" and that the advance of the army "would produce a *great moral effect*." Again, on the 16th, he says, "I do not believe our advance to the banks of the Rio Grande will be resisted."

Mr. Speaker, I have thus shown that the movement from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande was suggested and advised by General Taylor, because I know just now his opinions are all-powerful with the gentleman from Georgia and his political friends, and am sure they would not charge him with suggesting to, or advising, the President to do an "unconstitutional and unnecessary" act. But I do not desire to shield Mr. Polk from the responsibility of the movement. I have no doubt it received his entire approbation, and that he would have ordered it when he did without General Taylor's suggestions, as necessary and proper to the successful maintenance of our just rights in Texas. That actual hostilities grew out of it was not anticipated nor expected by either General Taylor (who was on the spot) nor by the President; nor was it the fault of either, but of the Mexican Government, who had refused to settle the difference between the two countries amicably, but rather chose to decide it by *war*, and then coming over the Rio Grande attacked our army in quiet possession of the territory east of it, claimed by us as a part of Texas, was the actual commencement of hostilities.

Sir, I will not stop to argue with the gentleman the question of the proper boundary of Texas; that has been done by abler hands a thousand times over, and those who are not convinced now, never will be. For myself, I have always been satisfied it rightly was the Rio Grande. But it is enough for me to know at present that Texas claimed to the Rio Grande, and that Mexico had at no time disputed her right to the east bank of that river any more than to the rest of her territory. This

boundary being claimed by Texas, we were bound, by the terms of annexation, to protect and defend its soil and its citizens until another boundary was agreed upon between her and Mexico; and we had as full a right to occupy it as any other part of Texas, till it was settled.

But, sir, suppose the war was begun "unconstitutionally and unnecessarily;" with what face can the gentleman from Georgia stand up in his place and charge it upon the President as a crime? Did not he vote for the annexation of Texas? And did not he and most of his political friends in the last Congress, in the very beginning of hostilities, before the blood shed by this unconstitutional and unnecessary act was cold, vote *ten millions of dollars and fifty thousand men* to carry on that war—aye, to carry it, not to the Rio Grande, but to the very heart of Mexico; to kill, not a few hundred Mexicans, but many thousands? I say nothing of the "preamble," so much talked of. I care not whether they thought or voted that the war was begun by Mexico or by the President of the United States—it is enough for me to know that they voted for the men and the money—the *means to carry on the war*. This, if the President was guilty of waging unnecessary and unconstitutional war, makes them all, yes, all! and alike, accessories after the fact—and guilty of all the blood shed thereafter.

And how stands the case with the gentleman from Georgia, in particular, who voted for the annexation of Texas?—annexation begun and completed by an Administration elected by his vote and those of his political friends. Did not his political friends on this floor tell him then, as was shown by his colleague on this side of the House, [Mr. Cobb,] this morning, from the records, that annexation would inevitably cause war—that it was *war per se* with Mexico? And did not Mexico herself declare the same to our Government, through her minister resident here? Did the gentleman from Georgia then think a war with Mexico unnecessary and unconstitutional—that it was "*odious*"—that a war to make the Mexicans sell their country was dishonorable—and that the people would rise in their might and close such a war? No, sir, no! He heeded not the admonition of his political friends—he regarded not the feelings and wishes of Mexico—he had no sympathy for her then—he thought it not dishonorable to take from her territory she claimed, as much as any on the east of the Rio Grande; but defied all, and voted for annexation—annexation, which many of his friends say now, was the original cause of the present war.

And here, sir, allow me to remark how singularly coincident have been and are the views of the Mexicans and of most of those opposed to the Administration on this floor. When Texas was about to be annexed, *that* was war, or cause of war; subsequently, when that question was settled, and no more political capital could be made out of it in the United States, nor remuneration expected from it by Mexico, that cry was given up in both countries, and the march of our army to the Rio Grande was substituted as war, or the cause of war. We never heard a word of any different claim set up by Mexico to any part of the territory east of the Rio Grande, until after it was started here. Before, she claimed all as Texas. When the march of our army from

Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande was alleged to be an invasion of Mexican territory, and an act of war, by gentlemen in the Congress of the United States, then it was that the Mexicans first reiterated it; thus showing a singular, but no doubt accidental, coincidence of opinion, running through the whole period of our disputes, between the party in this country opposed to Mr. Polk and the Mexicans.

The gentleman from Georgia says the war is unpopular—has become odious. Where, sir, has he found the evidences of its unpopularity? Was it in the hundreds of thousands of volunteers that offered themselves at its commencement?—men of all political parties, and of all classes of citizens. Did they deem the war unconstitutional and unnecessarily made by the wanton act of the President? Did the brave men, from generals to privates, whom the gentleman and his friends boast of as belonging to their political party, who marched to Mexico at the first, and at every call of the President, to fight in this war, deem it unconstitutional and unnecessary? No, sir! it is a slander upon the character of those of them who live, and upon the memory of those who fell. In my own State I know it was not unpopular then, and is not unpopular now. Its people are a peace-loving people. But when their country's rights and soil are invaded, they ever have been and ever will be ready to vindicate them at any cost of their blood or their treasure. Pennsylvania, at the first call, sent two regiments to the war, and would have sent whole brigades and divisions if they had been wanted or would have been accepted. Old Kentucky, did she deem the war unpopular? or Louisiana? or Illinois? or Mississippi? or Ohio? whose sons rushed by thousands to the battle-field. Nowhere was it so considered, except, perhaps, in a portion of New England. And where is the evidence of its unpopularity now? Is it in the mighty gatherings of the people everywhere to sustain the Administration in prosecuting the war? or in the resolutions of the State Legislatures that have come and are coming up to us? The gentleman deceives himself. His wish is father to the thought, and he mistakes the feelings of his friends within these walls for the voice of the people out of them. No, sir, the war is not unpopular, and never will be while it is waged, as it has been, in defending our rights, and to secure an honorable peace. The people of the United States have stood firmly by their Government in all its wars, and will stand firmly by it in this.

If the gentleman from Georgia and his friends in this House believe that the war was unconstitutional and unnecessarily begun by the President, as their votes on the record have asserted, and that it is unpopular and odious, why have they not taken measures to arrest its progress and bring it to a close? A voice from Ashland, always potent with them, and never more than now, has declared it to be the duty of Congress to make known the objects of the war; and a judge of the Supreme Court, also a leader in the same political party, has gone further, and told Congress, its duty is to propose the terms of a treaty of peace, and to compel the President to agree to it. And now, sir, without questioning the right of this House to propose a treaty, let me ask the gentlemen opposite why they have paused to obey these commands? Why have they not stopped the war, or declared the ob-

jects for which it is carried on, and the terms on which it will be closed? They have the power in this House to do all they desire. They have been two months in session, and have not yet taken the first step to stop the war, or to carry it on. No, sir; they have not even yet referred the President's message to the committees. Nor can they say that we on this side of the House have delayed their action. We have done everything we could do to hasten on the business of the House—voted constantly for action; while, on the other side, it has been nothing but procrastination and delay. Sir, I call on the gentlemen opposite to let the country know what they want; how they intend to close the war; what sort of a peace they propose to make. Will they accept the terms offered by the Mexican commissioners to Mr. Trist? How many of the gentlemen opposite will sign such a treaty? Perhaps thirty; not more. And yet these are the only conditions the Mexicans have ever proposed as a basis of peace, and these were offered when our cannon was thundering at the gates of their capital. Let it be known to them, as known it will be, that this House has declared the war unconstitutional and unnecessary, and that it has delayed or refused to carry on that war, and has determined to make peace on any terms; and will Mexico, do you think, grant to you the conditions offered to Mr. Trist? No, sir! she will demand indemnity from you for the losses she has sustained in a war you have acknowledged unconstitutional and unnecessary, aggressive and unprovoked, and she will be entitled to it, if such be really the character of the war.

Sir, I warn gentlemen opposite, that the course they are pursuing, however much they may profess to desire an early peace, is not the way to obtain it. It may suit their political party purposes to charge the war upon the President—proclaim it unjust, unpopular, and odious, and refuse to carry it on effectively; but this is not the way to ensure an early peace. The Mexicans have held out already, thus long, against our just demands, in the belief that our divisions would induce us to accept any terms of peace they might offer. Will not the speeches of gentlemen opposite, and the course they are pursuing, give them greater encouragement? I think it will. I call, therefore, on gentlemen opposite to come up to the question at once, and let it be known what they intend to do; how they intend to carry on the war; how they propose to make peace. This is due to the country, and to the brave men now in Mexico. Let us begin at once the new line of policy, if one is to be pursued. If the war is to be stopped and our army recalled, and we are to submit to an inglorious peace, let us know it—let the country know it. The policy of the Administration and its friends on this side, is known—war—till we obtain an honorable peace; indemnity for past wrongs—security for future good conduct. War—till it produces on Mexico the “moral effect” claimed by General Taylor—that will make her treat our citizens and our Government with the respect and consideration due from one civilized people to another, through all future time. This is what we propose. Yes, sir, our motto is, “WAR—or HONORABLE PEACE!” On the other side, NO WAR—DISHONORABLE PEACE! Let this issue go to the country, and the people will soon decide it—will soon thin the numbers, of which the gentleman from Penn-

sylvania [Mr. STEWART] boasted the other day, on the opposite benches, and leave you, sir, but few to count of this any-peace party in time of war.

Mr. Speaker, may I not ask the gentleman from Georgia, and any other gentleman opposite, what he would do, or have us to do, more than has been done by Mr. Polk to restore peace. Has not our Government already stooped low enough to Mexico? Can gentlemen opposite find a point still lower for it to stoop to, that will conciliate these (in their opinion) wronged Mexicans, and induce them to make peace with us? Have we not, at every step, sued for peace? Sued for peace when our army was at Corpus Christi—sued for peace when on its march to the Rio Grande—sued for peace after every victorious battle, and paused to give Mexico time to think and act? Our Generals were authorized to sue for peace, as well as to make war. Nay, more; did not the President stoop so far, after the insolent rejection of Mr. Slidell, as to send Mr. Trist with the army to sue for peace? Did not our army pause in the midst of its victories, at the very gates of Mexico, and sue for peace? Yes, sir, paused, lest its entrance into the Mexican capital might wound the Mexican pride, and postpone longer the return of peace. When did a victorious army ever stop before at the very gates of its enemy's capital and sue for peace? Not the British army in 1814, when it blackened with flames these walls. No, sir; there is not on record a parallel to the course of our Government in all the proceedings with Mexico—none where has been displayed so persevering a desire for peace on the one side, and so obstinate a refusal on the other? And, be it remembered, too, that through all Mr. Slidell's negotiations, in all our offers to treat of peace from first to last, up to the period when the commissioners met Mr. Trist in the city of Mexico, we had asked no indemnity, required no territory, had proposed no terms, but only asked them to hear us—to treat with us—to try to make peace. They refused to hear us—to hear our terms of peace, or to tell us theirs. What more would or could gentlemen opposite have done? And why should more have been done?

Has there been anything in the past relations of the two countries that demanded such forbearance and humiliation at our hands? Had not Mexico, during her whole existence as an independent nation, been plundering our citizens, to the enormous amount of upwards of eight millions of dollars; a considerable portion of which she acknowledged herself bound to repay, but never had repaid? Yes, sir, for twenty years or more, had she gone on in this course of outrage and violence upon the property of our citizens, and not unfrequently upon their liberty and their lives. True, our Government had frequently declared to her, that if she did not cease this system of plunder, and make atonement, we would be obliged to declare war upon her, and take the measure of indemnity in our own hands. Still we did not, but chose to bear with her rather than go to war with a sister republic, as she was called, though we had had cause of war twenty times over. So long had we borne with her indignities and outrages, that she no doubt thought we would suffer all and bear forever. This, sir, is the people for whom our sympathies are invoked by gentlemen opposite; from whom we are to ask no indemnity for the past, no security for the future.

Why, sir, it has been asserted on this floor, that these millions of dollars thus violently and wrongfully wrested from our citizens in peaceful and legal commerce with her, was no more cause of war than the non-payment of the debts of certain of the United States to citizens of Great Britain was cause of war upon us by that Government. Did our States forcibly seize the property of British subjects in their ports, or elsewhere, and appropriate it to their use? Were these debts thus created? No, sir; the one is a voluntary debt, accompanied by no violence or wrong; the other, a debt acknowledged to be incurred by violence and wrong. The one cannot be made cause of war by any international law; the other is cause of war by all law. Yes, sir; and had we made Mexico atone for these wrongs years ago, we would not be at war with her now. Had she then been made to feel a little of our power instead of all our forbearance, she would not have repelled our offers of peace, and treated us with insult and indignity, as she has done since.

The gentleman from Georgia has made a still graver charge against Mr. Polk than that of beginning the war unconstitutionally and unnecessarily. He charges him with purposely having placed General Taylor, and the army under him, in a situation "to be whipt or cut off," immediately previous to the battle of Buena Vista. I do not believe there is another man in the United States, not lost to every right feeling, that really believes the President to have been guilty of such an atrocious intention. I cannot think the gentleman from Georgia himself believes it, or his duty to his country and to humanity would compel him to bring in articles of impeachment against the President for so monstrous a crime. Where does the gentleman find evidence of this high treason of the President—this conspiracy with the enemy to procure the destruction of an American army, all of whose members were his own countrymen—most of them his political, and many of them his personal friends? History has but few records of a crime so unnatural; and yet, without a shadow of evidence to sustain it, the gentleman from Georgia makes it a matter of record, and sends it to the world. The charge is too revolting to human nature—too destitute of the appearance of truth to require refutation, and never could have been made or uttered by an American citizen but in a moment of excited political animosity, when his zeal for his party blinded his perceptions and his judgment. Did not the gentleman know that Mr. Polk had selected General Taylor to command the army in Mexico in preference to all others, and had treated him, during the whole war, with the greatest deference and respect, advising with him at all times, and mostly deferring to his advice? Did he not know that the position of General Taylor, at the time he speaks of, was of his own seeking? Who suggested the attack on Vera Cruz, and an approach to Mexico by this line? Was it not in the very letter from General Taylor to General Gaines, referred to by the gentleman from Georgia? Who withdrew the troops from General Taylor, to carry out his views? Was it not General Scott? And will the gentleman charge General Scott with conspiracy with Mr. Polk to rob General Taylor of his laurels, and destroy or defeat his army? Sir, the gentleman's reasons for charging upon Mr. Polk an attempt to destroy the whole American

army, merely to rob General Taylor of his laurels, is only equalled by the means he has invoked to defeat that attempt. He told us, in language at once eloquent and poetical, that the army of General Taylor would have been cut off or defeated at Buena Vista, had it not been for the Genius of Liberty—that Genius which presided over the birth of Washington, coming down to protect General Taylor and his army, and enable them to defeat the treason of Mr. Polk, and a Mexican army four times their number.

Now, sir, I have always been led to believe that the Genius of Liberty, and particularly that Genius which presided over the birth of Washington, was a celestial being, and her missions to earth were always to defend the right and to serve a just cause; and yet here we have the gentleman from Georgia invoking her aid, and actually making this being of Heaven fight for General Taylor and his army in a war characterized by him as unjust and unrighteous. Sir, can absurdity go further? It is no more to be believed that Mr. Polk sought to rob General Taylor of his laurels, or desired the defeat and destruction of his army, than that a Being of Heaven assisted General Taylor and his army to defeat the Mexicans, and murder them by thousands, in an unconstitutional and unnecessary war. Notwithstanding the absurdity of this part of the gentleman's argument, it is in perfect keeping with all his other positions, and with those of his party, in relation to the war and its origin. At one time and in one place, they attribute it to one cause, and at another time and another place, to another cause—some of them to one cause and some to another. In one place and one time, they are the friends of the war; another place and at another time, they are opposed to it. To-day they vote that the "war was unconstitutionally and unnecessarily made by the President," and hold him guilty of all the blood shed since its commencement; another day they vote their thanks to Generals Scott and Taylor, and the armies under them, who have shed all this blood. In one breath they say the President ought to be impeached, and dismissed, and degraded, for ordering our army to the Rio Grande; in the next they tell us General Taylor, who suggested and urged the measure, ought to be, and will be, the President of the United States. Again, they vote not to withdraw our army from Mexico; and, with the same breath, say the war is unjust, odious, and unpopular, and the people will rise up and bring it to a close. But, sir, it were a vain task to enumerate the inconsistencies of gentlemen on the opposite side; nor was it my purpose, in rising at this time, to attempt it, but merely to repel the charges made by the gentleman from Georgia against Mr. Polk and his Administration.

Sir, no man can be more desirous of peace than I am. I never want to see our country at war with any people. Our mission is one of peace. The principles of our Government will be best purified and perpetuated and spread over the world by peace and in peace. But the history of our race, through all times and in all parts of the world, admonish us that peace, however desirable, cannot always be enjoyed by any nation. War may be

forced upon us, as it has been upon other nations before us, against our will, and despite all our efforts to avoid it; and such is the present war with Mexico. Having been forced into it, I see no other or better way of ending it than to go forward. What may or will grow out of it, or be the end of it, no man can exactly foresee or foretell. But one thing we do know, that the path of honor and of duty is forward, not backward; and I think that also is the path to peace. For one, whether it leads to peace or war, I, and I believe all my friends on this side, will pursue it firmly and vigorously; confident the success that always attends a good cause, and has so invariably crowned all the efforts of our arms thus far in this war, will attend us to the end, and bring us out of it safely and honorably. But if it be the determination of gentlemen on the opposite side to submit to such terms as Mexico will grant them, and close the war and withdraw our armies, upon their heads be the consequences. No nation upon earth will respect you or your rights or your honor thereafter. You may expect to be treated as a band of marauders, ready to make war upon an offending neighbor, but too cowardly or unstable to prosecute it to a successful end. Mexico herself will treat your Government and your citizens with contempt, and renew upon your citizens her acts of violence and plunder, and you may remonstrate with her for twenty years more in vain. Yes, sir, you will have fixed a stain upon the American name and character that time can never efface. Nor this alone. Before you issue your order to your armies in Mexico, ingloriously to turn their backs on the cities and the fields their valor has won and their blood consecrated, take from your Department of War, and gather from all parts of the Union the trophies of their victories and send them back to Mexico. Erase from the records of this your national Congress—from the records of all your State Legislatures—from all that has been written or printed, wherever they may be found, all the votes and the words of honor and thanks so lavishly bestowed upon these gallant men, and let there be nothing left throughout our land to tell the story of their deeds—for these would but tell the story of their disgrace. Let not the gentleman from Georgia and his friends talk of doing honor to Scott and to Taylor, or evoke the spirits of Clay and of Hardin, and with words, however eloquent, encircle the brows of the living with wreaths, or erect monuments to the memory of the dead. There can be no glory, no honors won in an unjust war—in an unnecessary and unconstitutional war. Fix upon the records of your country that such has been the war your brave soldiers have been fighting in, or have fallen in, and you will have robbed them of all their honors and their glory; or worse, aye, worse than this, will have stained their wreaths and their monuments with innocent blood, shed by their own hands; and instead of embalming their deeds and their memories, as history ought to do, and I trust will do, among the defenders of their country's rights and honor—among her brave and true sons—you will (so far as your acts can do it) have robbed them of all but the fame of successful murderers.

